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ABSTRACT

Several explanations are proposed for community attitudes about the school system. The author claims that the most important factor affecting these attitudes may be the school's failure to develop effective ways of carrying on continuous dialogue with its community. The author specifies that an educator should subject his community to a regular examination rather than assume that the community decisionmaking structure is a stabilized constant. A model for examining the influence structure in a community presents four major categories: a consensual elite structure, where few citizens participate and a small group rules; the competitive elite structure, characterized by two or more ideological groups attempting to rule, but where few citizens participate; a consensual mass power system, implying general ideological unity with broad effective participation by a substantial number of citizens; and the competitive mass structure, analogous to the consensual mass but having some conflict because of the varying ideological base. A selected bibliography is included. (Author/WM)

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INFORMAL EXTRA-ORGANIZATIONAL FORCES AFFECTING EDUCATIONAL DECISION-MAKING

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INFORMAL EXTRA-ORGANIZATIONAL FORCES AFFECTING EDUCATIONAL DECISION-MAKING

This paper will explore the nature of informal[1] extra-organizational forces which impinge upon educational decision-making and teaching practices in the school. Increasingly, the public school system is asked to "explain itself" to the "publics",[2] by groups and individuals--some implicitly influential, others potentially so--by good men and bad. The last vestige of a kind of aura of "sacredness" about the schools has virtually been torn away in a society that is increasingly more outer directed, more questioning, less able to be fooled, certainly more outspoken, at times in an irrational way, and less sure of itself than in any preceding era. And, in post mortem election sessions or after newspaper barrages, boards of education, administrators, and teachers sit around figuratively holding their heads, saying, "My God, what happened? What did we do or not do to deserve this?"

How is it possible that groups or individuals can question such a sanctified institution as education and such a saintly collection of individuals as school administrators, board members, and teachers when these modern day St. Thomases say the school needs more money to educate society's children better? More to the point, how is it possible that these groups

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[1]There will be no discussion of formal forces which affect educational decision-making. Bodies such as city councils, state legislatures, and other formally constituted agencies which may formulate laws, and rules and regulations which restrict or modify the nature of decision-making in the school organization while important, are outside the purview of this paper.

[2]The "publics" is plural. There is no one public with a sole opinion. Citizens are members of many groups--ethnic or racial; recreational and civic; self-help and union--each with stated and implicit positions on matters of community or individual importance.

gather so much support from so many other "goodhearted", "clear thinking" citizens when they do question?

Attitudes about the Sub-System-Schools

There appear to be at least five general conditions which affect the attitude the publics may have about their schools.

1) The educational institution is more ambitious than it has ever been and is continually asking for a bigger cut of the public dollar pie --or is insisting that the pie itself be made bigger. These demands have the effect of increasing the school's "visibility" in the public's eye. And when one is visible one may expect to be shot at, especially if he is after the public's pocketbook.

Because of this too, many people are forced to make a painful reappraisal of their values. Educational leaders say to them, "You maintain that education is important and necessary, education you say is 'good' in the same way that motherhood and the flag is 'good'." "Therefore," these educators say, "put your money where your mouth is." However, many citizens would prefer to spend their money in other ways for more personal wants and needs. It's a painful choice--the citizen or his children; a new car or a new school. And he may not like it when the issue is raised and the value conflict is clarified.[3]

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[3]The value conflict may be seen also as the issue of busing children to achieve desegregation is examined. The citizen is for "quality" education and "equal opportunity", but resists transporting children to help achieve this. An interesting review of some of the value conflicts in American life is the one developed by the Lynds. An edited list of these can be found in Smith, Stanley and Shores, Fundamentals of Curriculum Development, New York: World Book Company, 1957, pp. 65-66.

In a very real sense, leaders in the school business have to sell the future, and sacrifice for the future, in a society that is less future-oriented. Schools are faced with a changing value structure.

2) The profession of education is losing its saintly aura; teachers are losing the affectionate regard of the public. The reverence for old maid, 100% pure, epitome of godliness and devotion, "our Miss Dove" has been shattered. Educators are throwing off the cloak of sanctity and the vow of personal poverty in an attempt to get economic advantages in place of a pat on the back and a written testimonial at retirement.

In the resultant ripping away of the stereotype, (and it was very unfair stereotyping) many of society's numbers are shocked and resentful. People are always disturbed when a cherished image is broken, when a myth is revealed as a myth, and when someone thought to be not quite of this world reveals himself to be of human motivations with the usual "crass" desires.

Few citizens would be able to put this feeling into words, but it is there and it explains in part the changing attitude which many have about their school and its teachers. It's a kind of a vague feeling of disenchantment. It manifests itself in the rather wistful comment by a citizen that "teachers aren't dedicated anymore".

It could hardly be submitted that the lot of the educator was better when his second-class economic citizenship was assured, along with his position as a second-level saint. But it ought to be recognized that schools and school teachers won't be accorded the advantage of both saint-hood and personal economic advances by society at large. The latter is

understandable and is a reality which educators must face. Blind faith goodwill to teachers by people can not be depended upon when educators opt to take off their halo. Support must be secured on other grounds than blind faith.

3) A third factor has to do with the motivation of the poor; the disenchanted; the disorganized, and misunderstood segments of our society; those anomie prone residents in large city and small town that seldom have been heard from--until lately. As society grows bigger and more complex and more pluralistic, the numbers of people who feel powerless grows bigger, also.

In the soft glow of plenty, the noses of those without are pressed to the window, on the other side of which the banquet is taking place. It's so easy, anymore, to see what one doesn't have.[4] One may not like it and may not know what to do about it, but he can go out and vote a resounding "No!" at election time to show his feelings, or march in protest--when provided appropriate leadership.

There are still substantial numbers of citizens who are not being accorded the opportunities to achieve the American ideal, and, frankly, they're not too happy with the educational enterprise in particular, as well as being generally dissatisfied. They are out to disturb the status quo and if the actions are sometimes irrational and irresponsible they are nevertheless achieving results.

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[4] An especially moving treatment of this condition can be viewed in the film "The Matter With Me" available from TTT Program, University of Miami, Coral Gables.

Educators are not really respectable to these folks and their counterparts at the low end of the social scale. It must be admitted too, that the educational enterprise hasn't done much to inspire their confidence and has covertly and overtly, consciously and unconsciously, been reluctant dragons when it might otherwise have been aggressively providing for their needs and fighting the social inequities.

Why are schools in some sections of town without libraries? Why are they allowed to deteriorate? Why weren't pupil personnel services being extended before the federal government partially funded these services? Where was the educators' forthright stand on civil liberties? (It took the N.E.A. two years to publicly endorse school desegregation; years more to clean up its own house.) Why isn't Title I E.S.E.A. money spent as the spirit of the law intends, rather than as simply replacement dollars?

The degree of alienation that an individual or group feels will also have political consequences at the local level. Some aspects of political alienation were found to be related to social status in a study of the 1960 voting behavior of Berkeley, California. Alienation scores occurred with disproportionate frequency among blacks, manual workers, those with less than a college education, and those who identify with the working or lower classes. Other background variables, such as age and sex, showed no consistent relationship to alienation independent of social status. Alienation had little to do with whether an individual identified himself as a Republican or Democrat.[5]

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[5]Templeton, Fredric. "Alienation and Political Participation," The Public Opinion Quarterly, XXX (Summer, 1966), pp. 249-261.

Alienation is reflected in emotional hostility toward the agencies of government. A democratic system of participation increases the possibility for local voting; however, since the participation is really based upon the individuals, hostility to and rejection of that system, the response is likely to be a negative one.

Erbe also found that socio-economic status affects an individual's propensity to participate in politics in three small southeastern Iowa communities. Individuals who are involved in voluntary organizations tend to participate more than those who are not, and that persons who are highly involved in such associations tend to participate more than those who are minimally involved.[6]

The political apathy of lower-status persons is a function of a feeling of political inefficiency. This, in turn, is linked to a feeling of political alienation. Thus, political alienation appears to be a reflection of social alienation or anomie--that condition of being mastered by threatening forces beyond one's personal control. If feelings of political alienation find expression in voting behavior, the vote is likely to be a vote of resentment against the political powers that be.[7]

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[6]Erbe, William. "Social Involvement and Political Activity," American Sociological Review, XXLX (April, 1964), pp. 198-215.

[7]An examination of this phenomenon can be found in: McDill, Edward and Feanne C. Ridley. "Status, Anomie, Political Alienation, and Political Participation," The American Journal of Sociology, LXVLLL (September, 1962), pp. 205-213.

4) A fourth factor has to do with the state of flux which can be found in most communities; city and suburb, small town and rural heartland. The character and social climate of an area can change quite rapidly. Population mobility is a fact of modern life, and unless school people keep constant watch it may seem as if overnight the publics are saying no or as if, overnight, organized resistance has developed, or as if overnight the curriculum has become irrelevant. It hasn't, of course, developed overnight. The implication is clear that a continuous process of feedback gathering and analysis of community must be a part of the community-school relations program.

5) Related in no small part to several of the other factors, it must be remembered that the schools are not the only agency or group which is asking for a portion--an increasingly larger slice--of the available public dollar.

The competition for the public dollar increases and some of that competition is very sophisticated, indeed. It walks the halls of Congress, the state legislature, and the city halls with aggressiveness and power. The opposition the schools get from some quarters is based on the knowledge that it may be "them or us", in the many senses of that phrase. Sheer survival of this public agency may well be whether they get their needed budget dollar from the legislature and the locality; through local tax collections or local donations. Thus, it must be recognized that there are other community welfare sub-systems such as police and fire protection, recreation, streets and highways departments, etc., which are also vital to the community's well-being.

To recapitulate, attitudes about the community's school system may be affected by:

1. A more ambitious and visible educational institution.
2. A changing view of educators by society members.
3. Large groups of people who are kept outside the mainstream of the "good" life and who know it.
4. Fast changing character of many communities.
5. Competition from other groups and agencies for the public's money.

Perhaps most important of all is the schools' failure to develop effective ways of carrying on contunuous dialogue with its community, and the several and varied groups, organized and unorganized, which make up the community. The school, as the largest single public agency which serves the community, is most affected of all by declining understanding on the part of the community. For in time, any citizen, vocal or not, organized or not, will fail to support that which he does not understand. Indeed, he presents a ripe prospective supporter, active or passive, for almost any well organized counter campaign. This may be especially so if in the process he saves money.

What a man does not understand, he may soon distrust and what he distrusts he cannot be expected to support. He may be easily convinced that what exists is an inefficient, bungling school system operated by "fat-cat" administrators and teachers which is responsible for most of his ills and frustrations; to blame for rampant juvenile delinquency, or whatever is currently wrong, which stands with its hand out like any other non-productive individual begging for the next public dole. In fact, it almost becomes moral to work against such a system.

Individuals and groups vary widely in the amount of influence they exert on local political decisions. A survey was conducted in the summer of 1959 to determine the patterns of influence in New Haven, Connecticut. Respondents were asked a laege number of specific questions dealing with their participation in the political life of New Haven.[8]

It has been found that most often only a few citizens participate to any great extent in local affairs by any action other than voting, and that variations in participation are related to variations in resources, political confidence, alternative opportunities and rewards. In general, the more resources one has (income, education, occupational standing, social standing, and so on), the more one is likely to participate. However, because the number of citizens commanding high resources is small, citizens with smaller resources generally outnumber upper strata citizens at every level of political participation. The more confident one is of his capacity to be effective in political matters, the more one participates actively in local affairs. This relati/nship tends to strengthen the influence of middle class citizens and to weaken the influence of working-class citizens. The greater the rewards a citizen receives or expects to receive from politics, the greater is his participation. Thus, the more "concerned" he is over politics, the greater is his participation. And the more "problems" he thinks the community is faced with, the greater is his participation likely to be.

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[8]Dahl, Robert. Who Governs? New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961.

Power Structure and Influence Systems in Communities

Power is distributed in unequal degrees throughout communities. What has come to be thought of as power structure refers to the informal decisions made by a relatively few people at the top of their respective social and occupational hierarchies about matters of community-wide concern. These appear to be the "people to see" if one is interested in promoting some big program in the community, for without their help any large-scale undertaking would appear to be in jeopardy. Active opposition on their part may not be necessary to doom a project; the fact that they simply do not support it may be enough. Educators and school boards who disregard this system of decision-making, or who fail to recognize that it exists, are operating in a precarious position.

There is nothing invidious about this. Every social order is a system of power relations with hierarchical super- and sub-ordination and regulated competition and cooperation. Power is a necessary function in a society. Power is also a necessary function in a community, for it involves the function of executing determined policies or seeing to it that things get done which have been deemed necessary to be done. The social rights and prerogatives implied in power functions must be delegated to specific persons to achieve social goals in any society. There does exist in every community group individuals with a strong potential for control.

But potential for control is not control. While a group may have a high potential for control, it may not have a high potential for unity, and political effectiveness, i.e. "power", is a function of a group's

potential for control plus its potential for unity. Thus, a group with a relatively low potential for control but a high unity may be more effective politically than the reverse. This latter may be of great significance to educational leaders as they seek to develop programs necessary to the total community but which are such as to not evoke support from an existing power elite. In serving as a unifying force for community action, the educational leader may be serving in his most valuable role. It may be that there exists within a community or a neighborhood a number of nominally low potential power groups which have high unity.[9]

The educator who is not privy to power formulation, and existing research indicates most are not, is forced to operate "blind". He does not have the opportunity to serve in the important informative and persuasive manner which could modify or change power attitude. This is most unfortunate. Influential people and groups can be persuaded when presented with facts, figures, and reason. The lack of this, and the perspective it would bring, can result in decisions and policies that have impeding effects on educational and community progress.

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[9] Hughes and Spence state for example, "There is some developing evidence, however, that a monolithic power structure is less characteristic of many rural communities than may have been the case formerly. Some members of what might be called the rural understructure have shown a remarkable ability to exert influence by unifying their fellows on given issues. The unionization of migrant workers in the West and the wresting of formal political control from whites by blacks in some southern counties and small towns serve as testimony to this. In neither of the examples given could the groups exerting influence be seen to have much potential for control by any standard measure but, because of a developing leadership structure, they do have much potential for unity and thus represent forces for change well outside the traditionally posited monolithic power structure." Larry W. Hughes and Dolphus Spence, Attitudes and Orientations of Rural Groups and their Effect on Educational Decision-Making and Innovation, Las Cruces: ERIC/CRESS, 1971.

It must be pointed out that too often educators have failed in the task of exerting influence when given the opportunity to do so and have not recognized the necessity of seizing the initiative at appropriate times when confronted with the need for change. Failure to have the facts and figures at hand, and lack of understanding of how to work effectively in the political arena have had negative effects. Facts, figures, and political sophistication are impressive to community leaders; hand wringing despair is not.

It is apparent that school leaders need to know who the influential people and groups in the community are. Power structure varies from community to community. Assuming that all "influentials" in a particular power system feel similarly about school issues, or that there always is unanimity is unwise. Too, there probably will be variation in beliefs about the school's role as an agent for orderly community progress. There is an indeterminancy and amorphousness about power structure, but the degree to which these various leaders are able to agree on the direction education ought to take and the degree to which they are able to accept certain principles and guidelines that school leaders determine, will, in great part, determine the extent of reform, modification, and growth of the educational institution in the community.

There are many instruments available to assist the school in measuring interest in the school, "educational enlightenment", and nature, extent, and identification of power people and groups in the community. A school's leadership should subject the area it serves to a "community analysis" for the purpose not only of developing strategies but, more importantly, to assist in developing a more adequate school-community relations program.

Before leaving this aspect, a reference should be made to the development of neighborhood power systems. This may be especially significant to schools. This development is quite understandable as urban and suburban communities become more and more complex and power sources become diffused. Most individual decisions to support or not support a community issue are based on the influence of friends and neighbors rather than on outside data.

Four Typologies of Community Power Structure*

One of the more useful models for examining political decision-making at the local level is that developed by Agger, Goldrich, and Swanson.[10] They cite Hunter,[11] Dahl,[12] and Lasswell and Kaplan[13] as the major sources which influenced their theory building and its application to four American communities.

Agger's study was concerned primarily with how people in a local setting decided to shift or maintain the ways their local government functioned with respect to welfare, social, and economic systems. It examined the changing structure of the influence system over time, as well as the appearance of the influence system at a particular point in time.

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*Much of this discussion is adapted from Hughes and Kayler, Patterns of Influence and their Effect on Educational Decision-Making in Monroe City, Columbus, Ohio: University Council for Educational Administration, 1971. (Monograph)

[10] Agger, Robert; Daniel Goldrich and Bert E. Swanson, The Rulers and the Ruled, New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1964.

[11] Hunter, Floyd, Community Power Structure, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953. (Paperback, 1969).

[12] Dahl, op.cit.

[13] Lasswell, Harold, and Abraham Kaplan, Power and Society: A Framework for Political Inquiry, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950.

It is important to note that a community's power structure should not be viewed as static but rather as subject to change. Thus, "typing" a power structure is analogous to taking a photograph; it is a picture at one moment in history. Movement can be expected and the direction of this movement might even be predictable as conditions are studied.

Agger et al. state:[14]

> The history of politics might be viewed as a dynamic movement between opposite poles; an active, interventionist government and a passive, laissez-faire government. ...To understand these shifts the analyst ordinarily concerns himself with such questions as who controls government, who has most political influence with government officials, and how can the patterns of political power and their changes . . . be explained.

Of further interest to the analyst is the nature of political conflict, power shifts, and the changing scope of decision-making in a community.

> . . . political history suggests that political conflict is generally most apparent when demands are made for substantial expansion or contraction of the net scope of national or local government. Even when there are no demands for eadical shifts in the net scope of government, conflicts may arise over the way government functions within a given domain and to whom it should respond [emphasis supplied]. Although political power for power's sake may be a private motive, these desires are ordinarily presented as being for the improvement of public finance, social justice, or social welfare. Regardless of the way appeals for a redistribution of political power are phrased and of the motives of their makers, they are in fact appeals or demands for some sort of shift in the scope of government.[15]

Four typologies of power structure issue from the research conducted by Agger and his associates. The typologies are labeled "consensual elite"; "consensual mass"; "competitive elite"; and "competitive mass". These types are based on two variables: "The

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[14] Agger, et al., op. cit., p.3.

[15] Ibid.

extent to which political power is distributed broadly or narrowly over the citizenry, and the extent to which the ideology of the political leadership is convergent and compatible or divergent and conflicting".[16] When dichotomized, four types of power structure can be identified. Figure 1 depicts this dichotomy.

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP'S IDEOLOGY	DISTRIBUTION OF POWER AMONG CITIZENS	
	Broad	Narrow
Convergent	Consensual Mass	Consensual Elite
Divergent	Competitive Mass	Competitive Elite

Figure 1
Four Typologies of Power[17]

The competitive/consensual dimension basically explicates the state of ideology within the groups, or among the individuals, who exert political leadership in the power structure. Thus, in the first variable, (consensual/competitive) "if only one political leadership group [in a community] shared a single ideology, the power structure would be consensual, whether mass or elite."[18] However, as Agger points out, there may be more than one political leadership and their ideologies might be either compatible or conflicting.

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[16] Ibid., p.73.

[17] Ibid., p.73.

[18] Ibid., p.73.

> An example of a condition of compatible ideologies would be two sets of political leaders representing different socio-economic interests but agreeing on a compromise-bargaining-trading perspective; an example of a conflicting-ideology condition would be two sets of political leaders who had such firm emotional commitments to an overall program for the scope of government relating to all areas of life that the loss of a single decisional battle or the prospect of compromise would be almost intolerable.[19]

The terms "mass" and "elite" refer to the extent to which proportions of the citizenry share in community decision-making in a manner which affects decisional outcomes. Therefore, the broad/narrow (i.e. "mass/elite") dimension of power inquiries into the degree of overlap between the leadership and the rest of the citizenry.

However,

> Power structures that are classified as mass in character might still have a minority of citizens sharing in power, although the minority would be larger than that of elite power structures.[20]

Too,

> Political participation may be high and political power broadly distributed whether there is a single ideology or convergent ideologies represented at the leadership level of power structure.[21]

The problem of analyzing and depicting a community power structure is a complex empirical question. Estimating and comparing power

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[19] Ibid., p.73. (It seems to be a matter of degree and perspective however. The conditions Agger and his group describe are based on the four communities they subjected to study and generalized to communities in the nation as a whole. They hasten to point out that if "communities in nations marked by more violent ideological conflict were compared with these American communities, the American communities might all have to be classified as consensual in character rather than competitive.")

[20] Ibid., p.74.

[21] Ibid., p.74.

distributions in order to classify a structure, for example as either mass or elitè, rely for the most part on the processes of decision-making selected for estimating. Overlooking a decision, or series of decisions, which has brought a share in the political power to large numbers of the community may cause an underestimation of the extent to which power in the community is distributed.[22]

In sum then, Agger and his associates provide a way of examining the influence structure in a community. To review the major categories of their model the following may be helpful:

A Consensual Elite structure may be generally viewed as a situation wherein one group or collection of individuals rules and very few citizens participate in making the important political decisions in the community. It is often called a "ruling elite" or "power elite" structure.

A Competitive Elite structure characterizes a situation wherein more than one group, each with varying ideologies, is attempting to rule, often in direct conflict with the other group or groups, although the ideologies may be compatible. In this category, as in the Consensual Elite, there is little participation in decision-making by the vast majority of the citizenry.

A Consensual Mass power system implies a general ideological unity in the community with broad effective participation in decisional outcomes by substantial numbers of the citizenry. (Again, it must be noted, that this does not mean that a majority of the citizens are included; only a substantial number, or that is, more than might be expected in an "elite" category.

22Interestingly, Agger, Goldrich and Swanson did observe, from time to time, high turn-outs in the election of government officials when there was a narrow distribution of power. Thus, they distinguished between the election of "persons" and elections about "measures" as evidence of mass involvement in community decision-making.

A Competitive Mass structure would reveal a community with more than one ideological construct, analogous in other ways to the Consensual Mass, given however to some conflict because of the varying ideological bases.

Common understandings about power indicate that it is not distributed equally, whether the society or community is simple or complex. Further, power may be redistributed among citizens over time. This means that there may be, and often is, movement from one of the Agger quadrants to another, over a given period of history. Thus it is possible, for example, for a community power system to move structurally from Consensual Elite to Competitive Elite to Competitive or Consensual Mass and back to a Consensual Elite, etc., over a studied period of some duration. Change is the norm in power structure and political stasis is a rather unusual occurrence. The educator who does not subject his community to a regular examination and analysis and instead persuades himself to operate as if the community decision-making or influence structure is stabilized once and for all, is operating from an extremely precarious position indeed; perhaps of ultimate disservice to the community.

Summary

The changing society views the sacred school somewhat less reverently, educators can expect controversy and opposition. Competition can be expected for the public purse. Too, there is a credibility gap between school and community; the educational enterprise has been less than courageous at times and less than honest at others.

Continuous community involvement is not just so many words in a school public relations textbook--it is a vital ingredient in a quality community-school relations program. Without it, schools should consider themselves lucky that they have had any citizen support. Most school

public relations programs are gimmickry, pure and simple. Gimmickry may sell cigarettes, it doesn't do much for the schools.

The informal structure of power in the community cannot be overlooked; neither should groups with a high potential for unity even though they have a seemingly low potential for power be overlooked. Power tends to shift on some issues and the same influentials probably do not operate in all spheres. Members of an existing power structure do represent some of the better thinking and are probably most affected by logic and research. Possible changes in the character of the community as well as shifts in power groups are not uncommon.

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